

Foreign Area Officer Community Information Paper

Who We Are:

Foreign Area Officers are the Navy's globally embedded strategic operators. Keeping the fight forward in today's increasingly complex global security environment requires persistent forward presence, and FAOs are an indispensable human element of the Navy's global posture. We do our work across all levels of the integrated fleet, the joint force, and the inter-agency as accredited naval diplomats, as the Navy's certified uniformed security cooperation professionals, and as the Navy's community of experts in regional political-military affairs, foreign languages, strategy, plans, and policy.

What Distinguishes the FAO Community:

The Navy recognizes that our network of allies and partners is nothing less than a strategic center of gravity, along with being one of our most enduring advantages over revisionist adversaries. These relationships yield assured global access and basing for the fleet, along with alignment, interoperability, and combined lethality for our fleet commanders and the joint force. FAOs are the Navy's only community of professionals who dedicate a career towards advancing objectives in this complex arena of international players. In his Guidance to the Force, CNO Gilday emphasized that "We must also succeed in sustained, day-to-day competition, winning future fights before they become kinetic." Much of great power competition occurs short of armed conflict and FAOs are on the front lines countering malign influences across geography and across domains. All of this requires regional expertise, local contact, and unity of effort among our worldwide network of maritime partnerships.

Our Proud Heritage:

Alliances and partnerships have always been central to our nation's security, and emergent transnational threats make these relationships indispensable in any future fight. The Navy FAO community reached full operational capability (FOC) in 2020, and we are the embodiment of our nation's powerful network of maritime partnerships, an enduring part of our naval heritage. Since the end of World War II, the United States - through shared commitments and sacrifices with our allies and partners - has built, led, and defended a rules-based international system that has benefitted all nations. Naval Officers conversant in foreign cultures, cognizant of foreign political-military developments, and fluent in foreign languages have historically been a critical ingredient in winning our nation's wars.

The Fully Qualified FAO

Once accepted for lateral transfer to FAO, the FAO-in-training's first set of orders is typically a PCS to Monterey, CA, Newport, RI or Washington D.C. to commence the training track which will give the officer the academic, cultural and linguistic tools to build on the strong foundation in leadership, naval strategy and operational principles learned in the officer's source community. All new FAOs should aspire to gain full qualification as soon as possible in his or her career so that he/she can put those skills to use as fully qualified Foreign Area Officer and to continue to promote through the ranks as a FAO. Full qualification is conferred through the Additional Qualification Designation (AQD) FA1, FA2, FA3, FA4 or FA5, each of which corresponds to one of the five AORs. Full qualification is achieved through the attainment of the following three milestones:

- a. A regionally focused Master's degree. This qualification may be waived by ASN (M&RA) for those with Master's degrees in other areas of study and/or who have *significant* overseas experience working in-country with a host nation's government and military. To date, for this waiver to be endorsed, the FAO community standard has been multiple overseas tours with JPME I completion or underway, or a master's degree other than a regionally focused International Relations or Strategic Studies course of study and a compelling timing need for the FAO to become a fully qualified FAO (in case where timing doesn't allow for the FAO in-training to attend a Master's program).
- b. Foreign language qualification via the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) and Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) goal of 3/3/3. In order to be designated fully qualified, a FAO must attain a score of at least 2 in at least two of the three modalities (i.e. listening, reading, and speaking) in a foreign language of their assigned region. Even though foreign language proficiency is important, the most important language that a FAO will use is English. FAOs should strive to master not only a foreign language but English as well, to include effective writing and briefing skills.
- c. One year (waiverable down to six months in extreme circumstances) experience in his or her assigned region.

FAO Regional Assignments and Work

FAOs are organized into five geographic regions that correspond to the current Geographic Combatant Command (CENTCOM, INDOPACOM, SOUTHCOM, EUCOM, and AFRICOM) Areas of Responsibility (AOR). FAOs are assigned to an AOR after their lateral transfer application has been selected. Although personal abilities and desires are taken into consideration, the needs of the Navy and the FAO Community drive AOR assignments.

FAOs must be prepared to go to hard jobs, many times back-to-back overseas assignments, where the community and the Navy requirements are. Approximately 70% of the time as a FAO will be serving overseas. The typical “in-region” jobs are in Security Assistance, the Defense Attaché Service, and on OCONUS-based Joint and Navy staffs. When not in-region, FAOs serve on staff assignments with CONUS-headquartered Geographic Combatant Commands, Navy Component Commands, OPNAV, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, Department of State as well as in other interagency appointments.

Our Culture of Resilience:

Navy FAOs are found near every important maritime reach of the globe. We often do our job from remote but strategically important nodes. At times we live and work in non-permissive and oppressive environments. Multiple overseas postings in such settings require individual and family resilience, high states of readiness, iron-clad ethical behavior, and leadership skills well-suited to lead teams of high-impact inter-agency and multinational partners.